



## Important Food Safety Tips During Power Outages

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MADISON – Power outages used to be fun when we were kids, looking forward to going home early from school and playing games in the dark, but as adults we have more important things to worry about. As we prepare for thunderstorms and possible tornados during severe weather season the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) reminds everyone to take caution with food safety during power outages.

"Perishable foods that are not stored at proper temperatures can pose significant health risks even if the food is cooked later," says Dr. Steve Ingham, administrator of the DATCP division of food safety. "Often people think that as long as they eventually cook the food, it is okay to keep. Unfortunately, if the food item hasn't been kept at the proper temperature all along, the bacteria have already started developing."

Following some simple steps can ensure that you don't put yourself or your family at risk for foodborne illness. The first step is to plan for an emergency before the emergency happens.

"Many refrigerator and freezer thermometers these days are digital, but you can't count on them when the power is off," Ingham says. He advises making sure you have appliance thermometers in both your refrigerator and freezer to help you determine if your food is safe.

Besides thermometers, Ingham recommends taking other steps to minimize your exposure to foodborne illnesses both during and after a power outage.

Prior to a possible power outage:

- **Freeze containers of water** to keep food cold as long as possible in the freezer, refrigerator, or coolers in case the power goes out.
- **Freeze refrigerated items** such as leftovers, milk, and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately.
- **Have coolers on hand** to keep refrigerated food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours.
- Pre-freeze **gel packs** for use in coolers.
- Check out local sources of **dry ice and block ice**.

During a power outage:

- Keep the **refrigerator and freezer doors closed** as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.
- If you plan to eat refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish or eggs while it is still at safe temperatures, it's important that each item is **thoroughly cooked to the proper temperature** to assure that any possible foodborne bacteria is destroyed.
- If there is any possibility that the food item has been at a temperature that is higher than 40° F for more than 12 hours, discard it.

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When the power returns, make sure to go through your refrigerator and freezer to discard items that are no longer safe to consume. The UW-Extension has a handy fact sheet on its [website](#) that will help you identify what items to discard and those that can be kept or refrozen.

You can also learn more at [www.datcp.wi.gov](http://www.datcp.wi.gov), on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/widatcp](http://www.facebook.com/widatcp)) and Twitter ([www.twitter.com/widatcp](http://www.twitter.com/widatcp)).

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